3 Start 14-Yr. Terms As Plan Solves Murder

Three men began serving 14-year prison terms Saturday after changing their pleas from innocent to guilty in the robbery-slaying of an elderly shoemaker.

It was the second case in which The SUN-TIMES Secret Witness Plan had led to solution and conviction in hitherto unsolved crimes.

A fourth man, also indicted in the slaying and held as a witness, had pleaded innocent. He was freed when charges against him weren't pressed.

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THREE SENTENCED

Those sentenced were Vito Zaccagnini, 23, of 517 Millard; John Groth, 23, of 3145 Lituanica, and Chris Iosello, 18, of 2933 S. Wells.

Joseph Barbaro, 22, of 2222 N. Austin, had been kept nine and a half months as an expected state's witness.

He testified briefly that he had been in on the plan to rob John Onesto, who had a shoe repair shop at 2103 Taylor, but had not gone along the day of the crime in June 1948.

NO WITNESS TO CRIME

Asst. State's Atty. James Brown told Criminal Court Judge Donald S. McKinlay that there had been no witnesses in the case.

"It was a mystery for more than a year until the Secret Witness Plan of The SUN-TIMES appeared," he said.

The plan, widely copied throughout the nation, offers a $5,000 reward for murder solutions, without revealing informants' identities.

Missing Onesto slaying suspect John Groth surrenders. He shields face as he enters state's attorney's office.
(SUN-TIMES Photo)

Gives up in Onesto slaying

John Groth, 21, one of four youths indicted for the murder of John Onesto on information developed with help of the SUN-TIMES Secret Witness plan, was surrendered to the state's attorney's office by his attorney, Emmet Byrne.

Groth denied any knowledge of the crime, though he was identified in it by another of the quartet, John Barbaro, who has confessed his own part in the plot.

Knows the others

Groth admitted he has known Barbaro for seven years. He also admitted he has been acquainted for 18 months with the two others, Vito Zaccagnini and Chris ~~Liosalo~~, whom he met while all three were students in the Chicago Barber College.

Onesto, 72, choked to death June 16, 1948, on a gag thrust down his throat by bandits who robbed his shoe repair shop, 2103 Taylor St.

The murder was solved after a secret witness submitted information in a letter to Postoffice Box 3444, Chicago 77, Ill., which led to arrest of Zaccagnini and Barbaro. They confessed, naming Lissalo and Groth as the actual robbers.

Barbaro said Zaccagnini asked his help to rob the shop. He said he refused but referred Groth and Lissalo to Zaccagnini for the attempt. Zaccagnini said he waited outside while Lissalo and Groth entered the shop and committed the crime.

Lissalo is still at large.

Identifies ring

Barbaro confronted Groth in the state's attorney's office and identified a ring stolen from Onesto. He said Groth had given another of Onesto's rings to his brother, Dan Groth.

"That's a lie," said Groth. He refused to take a lie detector test or to answer questions about his whereabouts since the solution of the murder mystery was announced.

Local and national politics covered by John Dreiske and Milburn P. Akers in the SUN-TIMES.

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